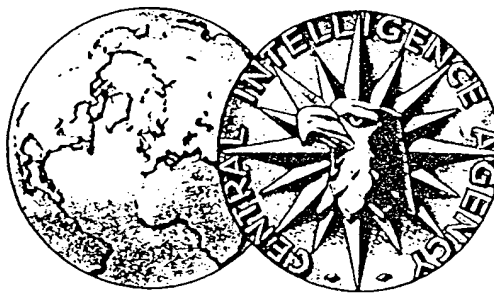


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# THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF POSTPONEMENT OF THE ITALIAN COLONIES QUESTION



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THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF POSTPONEMENT  
OF THE ITALIAN COLONIES QUESTION

SUMMARY

This study assumes United Nations General Assembly postponement for one year of a decision on the disposition of Libya, northern Eritrea, and possibly Somaliland. Postponement of itself will probably reflect Assembly inability to agree on either UK trusteeship for Cyrenaica, Italian trusteeship over its former colonies (except perhaps Somaliland), direct UN trusteeship, or independence—all of which will probably be aired in the present GA. The resulting deadlock would lead to postponement of the issue until the next Assembly session.

The general effect of postponement will be to promote, during the ensuing year, a welter of propaganda, conflicting claims, and international lobbying, as Italy, the colonial populations, and other interested states build up their cases in preparation for the 1949 Assembly. While it is impossible to predict accurately the final UN decision, postponement will increase the likelihood that either independence (perhaps after an interim UN trusteeship in the case of the less-developed colonies) or a compromise combination of one-power trusteeships will be the final solution.

Postponement is likely to result in increased sentiment favoring independence, particularly for Libya, the most highly developed of the three colonies. The colonial nationalist movements would have a year in which to demonstrate their strength, and native leaders, seizing upon postponement as an indication of indecision, would probably utilize the period to strengthen local aspirations for independence. Many UN members—such as the Arab states, the Asiatic nations, and some Latin American countries—which are anti-colonial in outlook, would thereby be encouraged to vote for independence. Should strong pressure for independence develop, the Soviet bloc, too, might switch to this policy in order to curry favor with the anti-colonial powers and block strategic use of the colonies by the US and UK.

The current Soviet proposal for direct UN trusteeship with a seven-power advisory council might also have substantial appeal to those favoring independence because it avoids placing the colonies under any one state, provides for their independence within a specified period, and permits most of the interested nations some voice in their administration. Many UN members might find such a proposal, perhaps modified to bar Soviet participation, more desirable for the less-developed colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. Italy and the Arab states might favor direct UN trusteeship provided they could participate.

Note: The information in this report is as of 15 October 1948.

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report.

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The lobbying by the interested powers which would undoubtedly take place during the interim period would probably tend toward a compromise solution. The US, UK, France, Italy, and the Arab states, sensing that their preferred solutions had little chance of being accepted, might seek some "behind-the-scenes" agreement aimed toward securing sufficient GA votes to support their minimum aspirations. For example, the three Western Powers might offer their support of Italian claims to Somaliland and Tripolitania in exchange for Italian espousal of UK trusteeship over Cyrenaica and French trusteeship over the Fezzan. The Arab states, fearful that Libyan independence is unattainable, reportedly would compromise on UK trusteeship over all Libya, but such a solution would cause a most unfavorable reaction in Italy. The Arab votes gained would also be offset by the probable loss of Italian-influenced Latin American votes. In any case, assuming delay and barring unforeseen developments, the prevailing anti-colonial sentiment among numerous UN members will make difficult Assembly approval of any one-power trusteeships.

For Italy, postponement and any of its probable aftermaths would mean great disappointment. Although the Government, in view of its recent loss of Soviet support, now favors postponement on all but Somaliland, the public would be bitter over any further delay. Even should Somaliland be returned, this feeling would be only partly assuaged. Furthermore, should Italian claims to Libya and Eritrea again be advanced, this time before the current GA, failure to acquire these areas would convince many Italians that they lack real support from the Western Powers. If approval of Italian trusteeships appeared unlikely, the Government might shift to a direct UN trusteeship, which would provide Italy with at least a voice in an advisory council, or to some form of multilateral trusteeship with Italy as one of the trustee powers. These solutions would better save Italian face than loss of its former colonies to another power and would enable Italy to protect the Italian settlers who would be at the mercy of native elements under an independent regime.

Should the proposal for a UK trusteeship over Cyrenaica—strategically desirable to the US and UK—be disapproved by the present Assembly, it would have no better chance of acceptance at a later meeting unless some compromise arrangement to secure the necessary votes were worked out in the interim, or unless UN members became so fearful of Soviet aggressive intentions that they would favor direct strengthening of the Western military position.

The probable willingness of the Cyrenaican leader, Sayid Idris, to accept treaty relations with the British in case Cyrenaica is made independent might make independence an acceptable alternative to UK trusteeship from a US-UK point of view. Under such circumstances, independence would at least be a lesser evil than a collective trusteeship in which the USSR participated.

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## THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF POSTPONEMENT OF THE ITALIAN COLONIES QUESTION

This study assumes UN General Assembly postponement for one year of a decision on the disposition of Libya, northern Eritrea, and possibly Somaliland. Although it is by no means certain that the Assembly will agree on postponement, such a development seems likely if pressed by the US, UK, and France.

Postponement would, however, probably be preceded by a heated debate, with the presentation of several alternative solutions ranging from Italian trusteeship to independence. Such debate appears unavoidable, since various interested states will undoubtedly insist on proposing their favored solutions. Libya, the most important of the three colonies, will be the chief bone of contention. The USSR probably will present its recent plan for direct UN trusteeship under the Trusteeship Council for all three colonies, while some UN member, such as Argentina, may counter by proposing Italian trusteeships. The Arab states will doubtless urge immediate Libyan independence. The UK intends to seek a trusteeship over Cyrenaica. It seems unlikely that enough votes could be secured to carry any one of these proposals, thus leaving final agreement on postponement, at least on Libya and northern Eritrea, the most probable solution. (There appears to be general agreement that some part of Eritrea should go to Ethiopia in compensation for the Italo-Ethiopian war.) Since the colonies question will come up late in the Assembly, the extent of discussion will also be limited by the length of the debate on preceding items. Should a bitter and protracted session occur over such issues as Berlin, Palestine, and Korea, the weary delegates would be more favorably disposed toward postponement in order to avoid additional wrangling and to hasten adjournment.

Agreement may well be achieved on Italian trusteeship for Somaliland, the least controversial of the three colonies, at the coming session. Many European and Latin American states, as well as the US, UK, and France, favor Italian trusteeship, and even the USSR, which once shared this view, may agree in order to gain a favorable Italian reaction. On the other hand, some nations might withhold final agreement on Somaliland to permit bargaining when the other colonies come up for discussion.

The effect of the initial GA debate will be to indicate the various alternative possibilities both to the native leaders involved and to the UN members with whom the final decision rests. Removal of the issue from the closed meetings of the Foreign Ministers and their Deputies to the open forum of the UN will focus world attention on the problem, and the various interested parties will then be able to gauge the relative

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acceptability of each of the possible solutions. Postponement at this juncture would allow full latitude for conflicting interests and propaganda claims to come into play as each side sought to use the year's delay to influence the final UN decision. These efforts would be accentuated if the GA were to send an investigating commission to the three areas. The probable results of this situation upon each of the major factors in the colonies issue are discussed below.

1. EFFECT ON SOVIET POLICY.

Postponement would give the USSR an opportunity to propagandize for some speciously reasonable solution like that proposed by Vishinsky in the Council of Foreign Ministers. Previously the USSR had called for the return to Italy of all its former African colonies under a UN trusteeship. The Kremlin, apparently appreciating that this would obtain only negligible long-term results in Italy, subsequently brought forward a plan for the eventual independence of the colonies following an intermediate direct UN trusteeship with an advisory council in which the USSR would participate. Soviet propagandists will no doubt make political capital of the fact that this idea is similar to one advanced by the US in 1945. The new Soviet proposal is obviously designed to block strategic use of the colonies by the US and the UK and to secure USSR participation in their administration. Moreover, since it specifies independence for Eritrea and Libya after a definite interim period, it would have some appeal to those favoring independence.

If it should become apparent that the administrative impracticality of such a trusteeship makes GA approval unlikely, the USSR might feel that its objective of denying strategic areas to the US and UK could best be served if it proposed, or at least supported, independence. In such a case, Soviet and Communist propaganda would portray the USSR as a leader for the freedom of an Arab and colonial people, concurrently emphasizing that the US and UK, in blocking independence, were denying freedom to such people. Thus by again changing its policy, the Soviet Union might increase its standing with the Arab world and with colonial peoples in general and, if the US and UK clung to postponement, might provide itself with excellent propaganda material to damage Anglo-American prestige in colonial and former colonial areas.

2. ITALIAN REACTION TO POSTPONEMENT.

Italian public opinion, already bitter over the colonies issue, will be exacerbated by postponement, particularly if the likelihood of an unfavorable solution is indicated by the initial GA debate. Return of Somaliland would, however, somewhat assuage Italian bitterness. Had the USSR not abandoned its support for Italian trusteeship, a UN vote to delay the disposition of Eritrea and Libya would have evoked vigorous pro-

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test from both the Government and the public, with adverse reaction against those who supported such a motion. Now, however, Soviet adherence to direct UN trusteeship has caused the Italian Government, in an attempt to forestall an unfavorable disposition, to favor postponement on Libya and Eritrea, though urging the immediate return of Somaliland. The new Soviet plan also eliminates the possibility of increased prestige anticipated by the Italian Communists as a result of western opposition to the return of Eritrea and Libya.

Though encouraged somewhat by the probable return of Somaliland, public feeling will nevertheless run high over further prolongation of the dispute and the possibility of a loss of areas whose acquisition predated the fascism for which Italy is being penalized. Apparently the Italians are more or less resigned to the possible loss of Cyrenaica, but aspirations regarding Tripolitania have been kept at fever pitch. If ultimate trusteeship over even Tripolitania should be denied Italy, public bitterness will be acute. Italians would be less bitter, however, over US trusteeship for Libya than over that of any other power and might, indeed, believe that their own security would be strengthened by the presence of US forces in the Mediterranean.

Italian policy during the interim period will be to seek, by all possible means, to influence a UN vote favorable to its interests. This lobbying will be most effective among the Latin American states, many of which, because of their large Italian populations and sympathy toward another Latin country, already favor Italian claims. Since the Government recognizes that the return of all three colonies is unlikely, it may seek some compromise arrangement with the Western Powers under which they would support Italian claims to Somaliland and Tripolitania in return for Italian support of British and French trusteeships over Cyrenaica and the Fezzan respectively. On the other hand, Italy is reportedly seeking Arab state support for an Italian trusteeship over Libya in return for a guarantee to grant it independence after one year.

Italian public opinion would be very unfavorable toward UK trusteeship for all Libya. To avoid any such plan, the Government might favor a direct UN trusteeship for Libya and Eritrea in which Italy would have a voice, or even a multiple trusteeship by Italy and other interested states. At the very minimum, were Libyan independence likely, Italy would seek protection for Italian settlers, assurances of limited immigration, and a guarantee of economic development privileges. Either of the latter courses would better ameliorate Italian public opinion than loss of Eritrea or Libya to other powers and would better enable Italy to save face.

Italians consider Italy disarmed by the Peace Treaty in the face of two powerful and unpredictable forces, both of which will put strategic interests before Italy's welfare whether in the disposition of the colonies or in the prosecution of a European war. Since controversy over the colonial issue has led some members of the Government to question the desirability of any political or military alliances with the Western Powers,

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Soviet support of Italian trusteeship would have been extremely embarrassing to the present Italian Government in its efforts to cooperate with the West at a time when such cooperation is important to the successful implementation of the ERP and to development of a united Western Europe. The Soviet switch to direct UN trusteeship has lessened the Government's dilemma. Even so, were a markedly unfavorable UN decision on the Italian colonies to appear to be in the offing, the belief that advantage could be gained from strict neutrality in the face of increased pressures from East and West would gain ground among the Italian people.

### 3. REACTION IN THE COLONIES.

One likely effect of postponement will be to increase local sentiment for independence in Libya and to a lesser degree in Somaliland, particularly should the inhabitants see from the initial GA debates the possibility of a favorable vote for such a solution. Postponement for one year would allow time for this sentiment to expand and for other interested parties, like the Arab states, to propagandize in its favor. If the UN were to call for plebiscites, the local inhabitants would probably favor independence, except in Eritrea where the demand for union with Ethiopia might overbalance such sentiment. Should immediate independence seem unattainable, some native groups might see merit in the latest Soviet proposal since it specifies eventual independence.

Postponement might lead to some disturbances in Eritrea and possibly in Tripolitania. The extent of the disturbances in Eritrea, where the pro-Ethiopian Unionist Party is strongly organized and active, would depend upon Ethiopian satisfaction with the portion of Eritrea it received. Should the UN debate indicate possible return of these areas to Italy, serious disturbances might occur in all three colonies because practically all the populations are anti-Italian.

In Eritrea, the Unionist Party, composed mostly of Coptic Christians, favors union with Ethiopia. Although the present GA will probably transfer at least the Danakil coast to Ethiopia, the Unionists will agitate for transfer of all Eritrea or, at a minimum, the inland plateau region. Their activities in this respect will be largely determined by the degree of direct incitement from Addis Ababa. The Moslem League favors Eritrean independence or, if this is not immediately possible, UK trusteeship. Lesser groups either favor UN trusteeship if independence is not possible or ask directly for Italian or UK trusteeship. The Foreign Ministers' Investigating Commission found strong anti-Ethiopian sentiment among the Moslem, pro-Italian Danakil tribesmen in the South, around Assab, but they are not very articulate politically.

Should the GA postpone the disposition of Italian Somaliland, rather than voting to return the colony to Italy, the effect on the native population would not be great. Difficulty with the strongly anti-Italian Somali Youth League, however, may be antici-

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pated in either case. The League, the most articulate local group, is seeking an independent Somalia involving the union of all the East African Somali tribes, or, barring that, a four-power UN trusteeship with independence after ten years.

In Libya, postponement would give an impetus to present extensive nationalistic tendencies. Native opinion in both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania favors independence and local leaders will undoubtedly seize all opportunities to press their advantage. Any indication of Italy's possible return would lead to prompt and bitter local reactions, including anti-Italian riots. In Cyrenaica, the Senussi tribes—comprising ninety-five percent of the population—will support any decision made by their leader Sayid Idris. While Idris himself prefers an independent Emirate with UK advisers, he will doubtless accept a temporary UK trusteeship. Should this appear unattainable, however, the Emir would certainly seek immediate independence. He would not favor any direct UN trusteeship in which Italy and the USSR participated.

Tripolitanian sentiment for independence has also been growing, and further latitude for its development would be afforded by a year's postponement. The National Council for the Liberation of Libya, led by Beshir Saadawi and reflecting the views of a substantial majority of the people, favors a united Libya. While it would accept the personal leadership of Sayid Idris, it is unwilling to support an hereditary dynasty as the Senussi insist. The Arab League supports Saadawi's proposal. Tripolitanian Arabs will be no more anxious than the Cyrenaicans for a direct UN trusteeship and will propagandize for a united independent Libya.

#### 4. REACTION IN NEIGHBORING STATES.

Although the Arab League, embroiled in Palestine, has been unable to devote much attention to the Italian colonies problem, its component states strongly favor independence for both Eritrea and a united Libya. Consequently if they see in postponement a blow to these aspirations, a loud vocal reaction—including fiery speeches, bitter press comment, and League resolutions—will inevitably follow. Actual disturbances might occur in Egypt, since Cairo has been the center of agitation for Libyan independence and Egypt is more interested in neighboring Libya than are the other Arab states. Following hard on the heels of the Palestine dispute, a denial of self-determination to the Libyans would strengthen antagonism toward western "imperialism."

There have been indications, however, that, fearful of an adverse UN agreement on Libya, the Arab states are slowly shifting in favor of a UK trusteeship for the entire colony. Although preferring immediate independence, they apparently might accept UK trusteeship as the only practical alternative which would eventually lead to independence and yet forestall some unfavorable settlement such as division of the territory

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and Italian return to Tripolitania. The most immediately interested state, Egypt, now reportedly favors postponement to avoid some such solution. The Arabs also might seek to trade their support for Italian trusteeship for Somaliland and northern Eritrea for Italian-influenced support on independence for Libya.

Aside from issuing strongly worded resolutions condemning the denial of immediate independence to Libya and perhaps attempting to incite the North African Moslems to demonstrations of violence, it is not anticipated that further action will be undertaken by the League itself. Increasing dissensions within the League and preoccupation with the Palestine problem make it rather improbable that the states concerned would feel in a position to take positive steps to further the cause of Libyan independence. Should the Palestine dispute die down, however, the Arab states would turn their attention increasingly toward Libya and would utilize a year's postponement to lobby for independence or for some compromise which would eventually assure this goal.

Ethiopian bitterness may be anticipated if postponement is approved for the whole of Eritrea. Ultimate cession of at least the southern areas seems assured, however. If unsatisfied by the UN decision, the Ethiopian Government will doubtless make a formal protest, accompanied by reiteration of previous claims, while simultaneously directing the "spontaneous" demonstrations of Eritrean Unionists.

#### 5. EFFECTS ON US-UK STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS.

The UK seeks trusteeship over Cyrenaica for building up a major base to replace former installations in Egypt and Palestine. While present GA approval of British trusteeship is by no means assured, a year's postponement might further reduce the chances for this desired solution by allowing sentiment for independence for a united Libya to increase. The UK will, of course, utilize the period to mend its fences locally and to seek wide UN support, but its efforts will be made more difficult by a strengthening of nationalist sentiment. Postponement will also increase the financial burden on the UK, since it will, in that case, continue to administer the colonies. Moreover, uncertainty over the eventual disposition of Cyrenaica will make the British, even if not restrained by the restrictive provisions of the Hague Conventions, hesitate to build up bases in this area.

Direct US strategic interests in the former Italian colonies include the Mellaha airfield in Tripoli and the radio facilities at Asmara, Eritrea—both made available by the UK. Postponement would temporarily extend British control, thus assuring continued availability of these facilities. Should delay increase the possibility of independence or direct UN trusteeship, however, it would militate against long-term retention of these strategic interests. British loss of Cyrenaica would also lessen the pos-

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sibility of US use of the bases there. UK treaty arrangements with an independent Cyrenaica or Libya along the lines of those with Transjordan might, however, provide comparable facilities.

6. EFFECT OF POSTPONEMENT ON THE 1949 UN VOTE.

Although it is impossible to predict, on the basis of the developments outlined above, how the 1949 General Assembly will vote on the Italian colonies question, certain generalizations can be made. These predictions must be purely tentative, however, because the positions of most states are as yet unclear and may furthermore be subject to change under pressure.

The three basic alternatives before the Assembly will be: (1) independence; (2) direct UN trusteeship, perhaps with a multi-state advisory council; and (3) a series of one-power trusteeships (a fourth possibility for Eritrea would be outright cession to Ethiopia, if not previously done in 1948, perhaps with cession of the western Moslem area to the Sudan). Yet another possibility would be a multiple trusteeship, such as a UK-French-Italian-Egyptian trusteeship for Libya, but the administrative impracticality of such a condominium would greatly limit its chances of UN acceptance. It is by no means certain that any *one* of these solutions would be approved for *all* three colonies. Some combination of them appears more likely.

Insofar as postponement leads to an increase in local sentiment for independence, particularly in Libya, it is likely to influence the UN vote of the anti-colonial bloc. Immediate independence would probably be strongly favored only for this colony—relatively the most advanced. It would most likely be supported by the six Arab states, seven other Asiatic nations, some Latin American members like Guatemala, Mexico, and Ecuador, and possibly also by Liberia. The six Slav votes might also be switched to independence, thus bringing the total to some twenty-three. These states can block any other solution if they cling to independence. Many of them, however, should they see the impossibility of securing majority approval, would probably swing to some other solution, particularly if pressed by the US and UK. The anti-colonial bloc might urge plebiscites in the colonies, which would have wide UN appeal and would probably lead to independence, at least for Libya. On the other hand, if the UN sent out an investigating commission, its report might tend to emphasize the conclusion of the Foreign Ministers' Commission that none of the colonies is adequately prepared for self-government and hence might recommend that some interim trusteeship is desirable.

Substantial UN sentiment might develop, particularly among the anti-colonial bloc, for some form of direct UN trusteeship if independence seemed unattainable. Such a solution would probably appear more suitable for Eritrea and Somaliland, which

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are less ripe for self-government. While little more than the six Slav votes would be forthcoming for the present Soviet-sponsored proposal *per se*, if it were modified to exclude Soviet participation in any advisory council and to include other interested states such as Egypt, it might appeal to many nations which dislike the idea of one-power trusteeships and which feel the interests of the local inhabitants would be better protected by the UN.

If, during postponement, the US, UK, France, and Italy could reach some compromise agreement on the division of the colonies, it might have a good chance for securing the necessary two-thirds majority. The Western Powers and Italy could probably swing the bulk of the Latin bloc, while the Western European states, four of the British dominions, Ethiopia, Greece, Turkey, and possibly Liberia would likely extend their support. This would bring the total vote to thirty-six, almost enough for a majority. Firm opposition from the Slav bloc, the Arab states, the seven anti-colonial Asiatic nations, and one or two others could block any such solution. The US and UK, however, might be able to sway the votes of some of these states, such as China, Iran, Afghanistan, or the Philippines. A provision for independence after a definite, specified trusteeship period might partially allay the misgivings of these nations and would probably be sought by them.

On the other hand, should the Western Powers reach an agreement with the Arab states to back UK trusteeship for all Libya with automatic independence after a certain period (reportedly favored by the Arab bloc), they could probably marshal a substantial UN vote for this solution. The Arab bloc, most Western European states, four British dominions, Ethiopia, Greece, Turkey, and possibly Liberia, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and China might be prevailed upon to give their support. Unless the majority of the anti-colonial Middle and Far Eastern states followed the Arab lead in supporting this solution, however, the addition of the Arab bloc vote, *per se*, might be offset by loss of those Latin American states favoring Italy's claims to the area.

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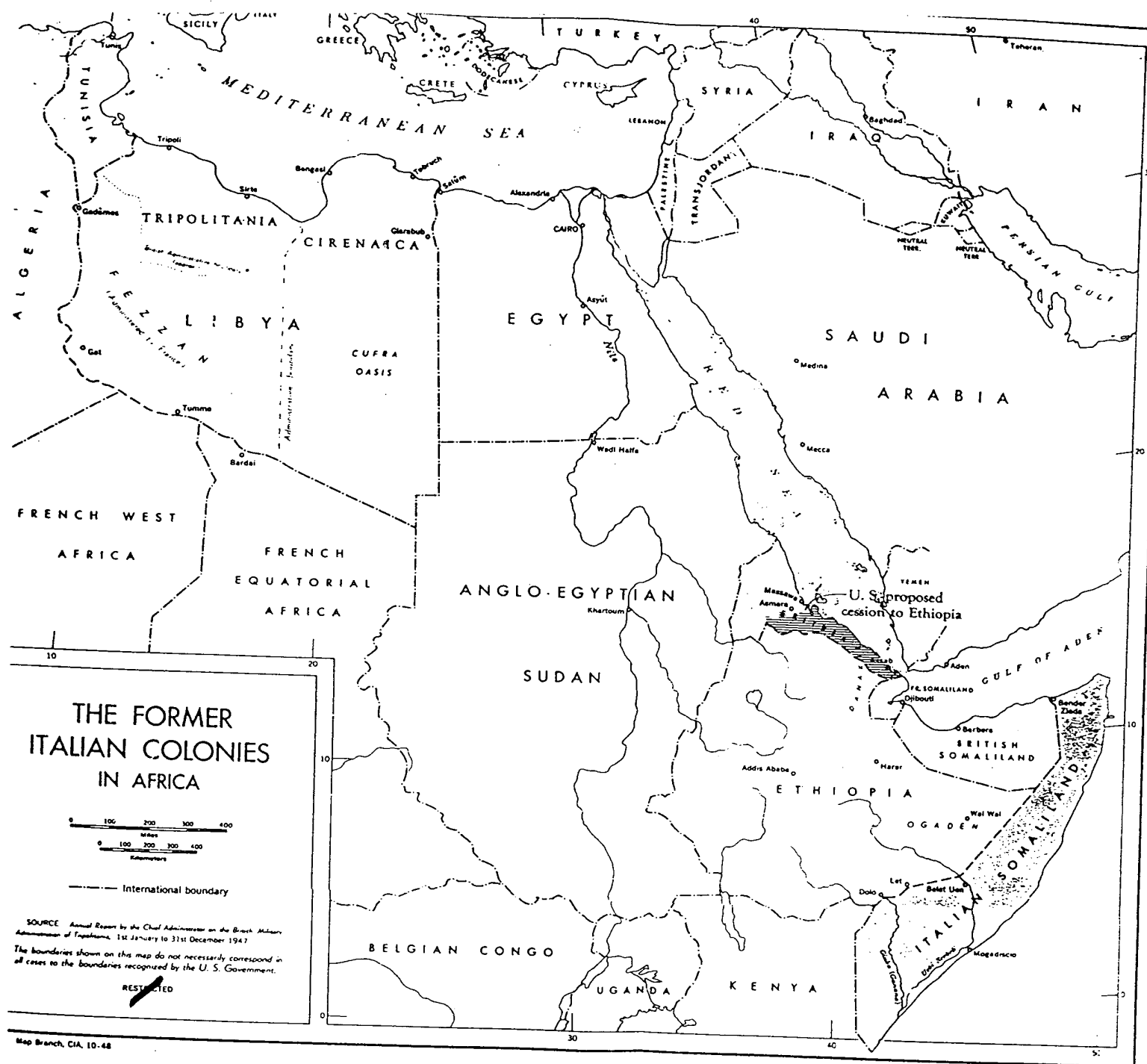
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